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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0048
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0072
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0064
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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0064
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0072
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 TASHKENT 000003

SIPDIS SIPDIS
DEPT FOR SCA, PRM, DRL, AND INR
PRM FOR MATTHEW JOHNSON
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

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UZ
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: ACTIVIST REPORTS ON KILLING OF AKROMIYIST;
ANDIJON

REFUGEES

REF: a) 08 TASHKENT 155; 08 TASHKENT 1505; 08 TASHKENT 898

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, Poloff; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: An Andijon-based human rights activist recently

reported the killing by law enforcement officials of a young member of "Akromiya," a religious-business organization whose members were at the center of the 2005 Andijon events. The activist specifically requested that the United States not report the killing publicly, fearing that the information will be traced back to him. During a series of recent meetings, the activist also reported that authorities have retaliated against his imprisoned son for his human rights activism; shared his belief that Andijon-based Imam Nematjon Parpiev, who disappeared in September 1997, had died in an Uzbek prison; described Andijon as "an occupied city" ruled by outsiders; provided information on the treatment of Andijon refugees who have returned to Uzbekistan; shared his recollections from the 2005 Andijon events; and thanked the Ambassador for his human rights advocacy and assistance to human rights defenders. While it is impossible to verify the killing of the Akromiyist, we believe the report is credible. The activist's information on Andijon refugees also calls into question reports by Human Rights Watch and others that such refugees and their family members continue to face systematic persecution. End summary.

ANDIJON-BASED ACTIVIST REPORTS ON AKROMIYIST KILLING

12. (C) On December 19, Andijon-based human rights activist Saidjahon Zaynabiddinov reported that law enforcement officials in

Andijon beat to death Khoshimjon Kadirov, a young member of the "Akromiya" business-religious organization (Note: Some independent religious experts maintain that Akromiya, whose roots lie in the Ferghana Valley, is an informal association promoting business along Islamic religious principles, while the government claimed that it was a branch of the banned religious extremist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. The imprisonment of 23 businessmen with links to Akromiya sparked the violent Andijon events in 2005. End note.) According to Zaynabiddinov, Kadirov was arrested at his home by Andijon police on October 15. Kadirov had reportedly been on a wanted list since 2005, but Zaynabiddinov remarked that Kadirov had been hiding "in plain sight" and claimed authorities knew of his location for some time. On October 25, Kadirov was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in Tashkent, where officers allegedly beat him to death. Zaynabiddinov attended Kadirov's funeral on November 11, where relatives reportedly informed him about the incident.

13. (C) According to Zaynabiddinov, two of Kadirov's brothers, Khakimjon and Khotamjon Kadirov - were imprisoned in 2005 and are currently being held at a prison in Navoi province. Another one of Kadirov's brothers, Rakhimjon Kadirov, has been granted political asylum in the United States and is currently residing in Idaho. Zaynabiddinov gave poloff a phone number in Idaho where the brother could be contacted and suggested that the brother might know more details about the case.

14. (C) Zaynabiddinov specifically requested that the United States make no public comment regarding Kadirov's killing, as he feared that Uzbek authorities would trace the report back to him and

TASHKENT 00000003 002 OF 006

REFUGEES

possibly retaliate against him or his imprisoned son (see para 5)

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AUTHORITIES RETALIATED AGAINST IMPRISONED SON

15. (C) Zaynabiddinov admitted that his son, Ilkhom Zaynabiddinov, was engaged in illegal activities and was rightfully convicted of forgery and imprisoned a few years ago. Zaynabiddinov, however, argued that authorities have retaliated against his imprisoned son for his human rights work, treating the son "almost like a hostage." Ilkhom finished half of his sentence in October and, in accordance with Uzbek law, was transferred from a maximum security prison in Tashkent to a minimum security prison in Chirchiq in Tashkent province. On December 16, Zaynabiddinov met with Vitaliy Pomerov - a researcher for the Memorial Human Rights Group in Moscow - in Kyrgyzstan to discuss a case in which a large number of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members from Osh province, including 15 women, were reportedly convicted by Kyrgyz authorities for involvement in a riot and received long prison sentences. Two days later, Ilkhom was charged with violating internal prison violations and was temporarily transferred back to a maximum security prison in Tashkent. Ilkhom was accused of using a cell phone, in contravention of prison regulations. According to Zaynabiddinov, most prisoners at the Chirchiq facility use cell phones and are normally not punished by prison authorities. Zaynabiddinov believed the transfer was temporary and that his son would be returned to Chirchiq soon. He also reported that he was in good health.

¶6. (C) Similarly, Zaynabiddinov reported that Ilkhom was beaten in prison by inmates in March 2007 shortly before Zaynabiddinov (who himself was imprisoned at the time) was scheduled to meet with a European Union delegation. Zaynabiddinov believed the incident was arranged by prison authorities and was intended to send him a clear signal not to criticize Uzbek authorities in front of the EU delegation, which he refrained from doing. "Things do not happen in Uzbek prisons at random, there is always a reason," he remarked.

¶7. (C) In contrast, Zaynabiddinov reported that he was treated well by Uzbek authorities during his own imprisonment and suffered no physical or mental abuse. He was originally sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in January 2006 for extremist activity in connection with the May 2005 Andijon events. Zaynabiddinov was one of the few activists in Andijon to provide up-to-the minute reporting on the events as they unfolded. In the days after the Andijon events, Zaynabiddinov gave dozens of interviews to the international press and others, accusing Uzbek forces of shooting unarmed protesters. He was amnestied and released from prison on February 2, 2008 (ref A).

SHARES BELIEF THAT IMAM PARPIEV DIED IN PRISON

TASHKENT 00000003 003 OF 006

REFUGEES

¶8. (C) Zaynabiddinov shared his belief that Andijon-based Imam Nematjon Parpiev, who disappeared in September 1997, had died in an Uzbek prison. Zaynabiddinov explained that while he was imprisoned in 2006, he inquired about Parpiev and was reportedly told by a prison guard that the Imam was imprisoned and was severely ill and would likely die soon. Parpiev was the former assistant of Imam Mirzoev, who disappeared with another assistant, Ramazanbek Matkariomv, while attempting to travel from Tashkent to Moscow for an international conference in 2005. After Mirzoev's disappearance, his mosque in Andijon was labeled "Wahhabi" and closed by authorities.

DESCRIBES ANDIJON AS AN "OCCUPIED CITY"

¶9. (C) In a series of discussions this past fall with poloff, Zaynabiddinov frequently described the current atmosphere in Andijon as one of "an occupied city," noting that many of its high-level officials come from outside Andijon province. It is not unusual for President Karimov to appoint hokims (provincial governors) who come from different provinces (presumably to weaken the influence of regional clan affiliations). However, in contrast with other provinces, Zaynabiddinov observed that almost no high-level officials in Andijon actually come from Andijon province, a situation he said was highly resented by local residents. Nevertheless, he downplayed the possibility of another violent uprising in Andijon, observing that while residents were unhappy, Andijon was "not a ticking time bomb." He also explained that many residents were still cowed by the memories of the 2005 events and the subsequent government crackdown and were afraid to participate in activities that could be deemed "anti-constitutional." He observed that authorities have kept such a tight lid on Andijon province that there actually has been a decline in perceptible corruption. However, he also noted that

residents were angered this fall after Uzbek border guards shot several residents who smuggled goods from neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

PROVIDES INFORMATION ON ANDIJON "RETURNEES"

¶10. (C) Zaynabiddinov reported speaking with several individuals who had fled abroad following the Andijon events, including to the United States, and who had subsequently returned to the city. He estimated that there were roughly 50 such returnees in Andijon. He noted that most of the former refugees regretted returning to Andijon, not because they faced political persecution, but because they gave up economic opportunities they had abroad. Many of the former refugees reportedly have been unable to find employment in Andijon because employers are wary to be associated with them. However, Zaynabiddinov also noted that authorities in some instances have provided jobs to returnees. The returnees also remain under the watchful eye of Andijon authorities and must report on their activities to the police twice a month and have been warned not to congregate together in large groups. He noted that authorities had opened criminal investigations against two of the returnees, but later dropped the charges. Otherwise, Zaynabiddinov said he was unable to find any evidence that

TASHKENT 00000003 004 OF 006

REFUGEES

returnees had been imprisoned, mistreated, or persecuted by local authorities.

¶11. (C) When asked why the individuals decided to return to Uzbekistan, Zaynabiddinov explained that it was mostly due to cultural factors, observing that it was difficult for Uzbeks, who typically come from very tight-knit families, to remain abroad away from their relatives for long periods of time. Zaynabiddinov was also told by some of the refugees that Uzbek authorities had reached out to them through their Embassies abroad and offered them safe passage back to Uzbekistan. The Uzbek authorities reportedly promised the refugees that they would not be prosecuted unless evidence emerged that they had borne weapons during the Andijon events and that they would be provided with economic assistance. Zaynabiddinov also reported that authorities in Andijon have provided periodic economic assistance to families who had lost relatives during the Andijon events.

¶12. (C) In some cases, Zaynabiddinov reported that Mahalla (neighborhood committee) leaders have used non-violent pressure tactics against family members to encourage refugees to return home, such as by withholding government rations of cooking oil and flour. Zaynabiddinov was careful to note this was not direct physical pressure, but indirect moral pressure. Zaynabiddinov also observed that the harassment of Andijon refugees and their families has been exaggerated by some individuals seeking to acquire political asylum abroad. "There are many who attempt to use the Andijon events for their own ends," Zaynabiddinov noted.

SHARES RECOLLECTIONS FROM ANDIJON EVENTS AND AFTERMATH

¶13. (C) Zaynabiddinov shared his recollection of the 2005 Andijon

events and subsequent government crackdown. He estimated that about 2,000 Andijon residents had gathered on Andijon's main square on May 13, 2005, before Uzbek government authorities opened fire on them, killing about 500 (Note: This number is higher than 178 dead reported by Uzbek authorities, but also less than reported by other human rights activists. End note.) He also estimated that over 500 persons were detained by Uzbek authorities in the subsequent crackdown, with over three hundred of them being later imprisoned. He reported being told by an Uzbek Prosecutor in December 2005 that 256 persons had already been convicted and imprisoned for participation in the events. He also reported that at least 50 other individuals who fled to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan after the events were later forcibly returned and imprisoned in Uzbekistan in 2005 and 2006.

THANKS AMBASSADOR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE

¶14. (C) On November 20, the Ambassador met with Zaynabiddinov and his colleague Anvar Numanov, a member of the of the Ezgulik human rights group in Andijon. As the two explained, Zaynabiddinov hid

TASHKENT 00000003 005 OF 006

REFUGEES

in Numanov's home for some time after the Andijon events in 2005.

Zaynabiddinov thanked the Ambassador for his human rights advocacy, which he credited with the decision by Uzbek authorities to release him from prison in early 2008. He also thanked the Embassy for the assistance he had received since his release from prison, noting that he had been recently given a Democracy Commission grant to monitor human rights in Andijon, including investigating the welfare of Andijon refugees. He explained that he was still attempting to register a local branch of the Ezgulik human rights group in Andijon province, noting that Andijon authorities have yet to make a final decision on an application for registration that he had submitted in October (Note: While Ezgulik is registered at the national level, its local branch in Andijon remains unregistered. End note).

COMMENT

¶15. (C) While it is impossible for us to verify Zaynabiddinov's information on the killing of the Akromiyist, we believe it is credible. Zaynabiddinov has long been a reliable Embassy contact and his reporting tends to be more balanced and less sensational than that of other Uzbek human rights activists. If true, Kadirov's killing suggests that a campaign against Akromiyists and other persons suspected of involvement in the 2005 Andijon events still continues on some level. Whether such a campaign is state-directed is unclear. The report that Kadirov was transferred from Andijon to Tashkent suggests that more than just Andijon-level officials were involved in his arrest, but it is also possible that Akromiyists are simply easy targets for police officers and MVD officials seeking to fulfill arrest quotas and prove to their superiors that they are taking a tough stance against alleged terrorists.

¶16. (C) Zaynabiddinov's information suggests that Andijon refugees who have returned to Uzbekistan face less severe persecution than

alleged by international human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, which released a report on Andijon refugees in the spring of 2008. Human Rights Watch conducted its research for the report entirely by speaking with Andijon refugees in southern Kyrgyzstan and did not speak with individuals currently in Andijon. While Human Rights Watch, whose Tashkent office director was denied accreditation this year, can hardly be faulted for having limited access to individuals in Uzbekistan, information provided by refugees needs to be viewed critically. As Zaynabiddinov himself noted, it is not out of the realm of possibility that some of these individuals are economic refugees who are exaggerating reports of persecution in a bid to receive political asylum in third countries. We will continue to follow the situation in Andijon as closely as possible. We remain concerned not only about the treatment of Andijon refugees who return to Uzbekistan, but also about the government's continued attempts to convince third countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Russia, to extradite Uzbek citizens, including some who have applied or have attempted to apply for political asylum (ref B and C). Individuals who have been forcibly returned to Uzbekistan, rather than those who voluntarily returned to Andijon, are more likely to endure mistreatment and denial of due process upon their return. Andijon-related matters remain high on the list of bilateral issues that need to be discussed between senior U.S. and Uzbek civilian officials early in the new U.S. Presidential Administration.

TASHKENT 00000003 006 OF 006

REFUGEES

1. (C) Summary: An Andijon-based human rights activist recently reported the killing by law enforcement officials of a young member of "Akromiya," a religious-business organization whose members were at the center of the 2005 Andijon events. The activist specifically requested that the United States not report the killing publicly, fearing that the information will be traced back to him. During a series of recent meetings, the activist also reported that authorities have retaliated against his imprisoned son for his human rights activism; shared his belief that Andijon-based Imam Nematjon Parpiev, who disappeared in September 1997, had died in an Uzbek prison; described Andijon as "an occupied city" ruled by outsiders; provided information on the treatment of Andijon refugees who have returned to Uzbekistan; shared his recollections from the 2005 Andijon events; and thanked the Ambassador for his human rights advocacy and assistance to human rights defenders. While it is impossible to verify the killing of the Akromiyist, we believe the report is credible. The activist's information on Andijon refugees also calls into question reports by Human Rights Watch and others that such refugees and their family members continue to face systematic persecution. End summary.

ANDIJON-BASED ACTIVIST REPORTS ON AKROMIYIST KILLING

2. (C) On December 19, Andijon-based human rights activist Saidjahon Zaynabiddinov reported that law enforcement officials in Andijon beat to death Khoshimjon Kadirov, a young member of the "Akromiya" business-religious organization (Note: Some independent religious experts maintain that Akromiya, whose roots lie in the Ferghana Valley, is an informal association promoting business along Islamic religious principles, while the government claimed that it was a branch of the banned religious extremist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. The imprisonment of 23 businessmen with links to Akromiya sparked the violent Andijon events in 2005. End note.) According to Zaynabiddinov, Kadirov was arrested at his home by Andijon police on October 15. Kadirov had reportedly been on a wanted list since 2005, but Zaynabiddinov remarked that Kadirov had been hiding "in plain sight" and claimed authorities knew of his location for some time. On October 25, Kadirov was transferred to

the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in Tashkent, where officers allegedly beat him to death. Zaynabiddinov attended Kadirov's funeral on November 11, where relatives reportedly informed him about the incident.

13. (C) According to Zaynabiddinov, two of Kadirov's brothers, Khakimjon and Khotamjon Kadirov - were imprisoned in 2005 and are currently being held at a prison in Navoi province. Another one of Kadirov's brothers, Rakhimjon Kadirov, has been granted political asylum in the United States and is currently residing in Idaho. Zaynabiddinov gave poloff a phone number in Idaho where the brother could be contacted and suggested that the brother might know more details about the case.

14. (C) Zaynabiddinov specifically requested that the United States make no public comment regarding Kadirov's killing, as he feared that Uzbek authorities would trace the report back to him and possibly retaliate against him or his imprisoned son (see para 5).

AUTHORITIES RETALIATED AGAINST IMPRISONED SON

15. (C) Zaynabiddinov admitted that his son, Ilkhom Zaynabiddinov, was engaged in illegal activities and was rightfully convicted of forgery and imprisoned a few years ago. Zaynabiddinov, however, argued that authorities have retaliated against his imprisoned son for his human rights work, treating the son "almost like a hostage." Ilkhom finished half of his sentence in October and, in accordance with Uzbek law, was transferred from a maximum security prison in Tashkent to a minimum security prison in Chirchiq in Tashkent province. On December 16, Zaynabiddinov met with Vitaliy Pomerov - a researcher for the Memorial Human Rights Group in Moscow - in Kyrgyzstan to discuss a case in which a large number of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members from Osh province, including 15 women, were reportedly convicted by Kyrgyz authorities for involvement in a riot and received long prison sentences. Two days later, Ilkhom was charged with violating internal prison regulations and was temporarily transferred back to a maximum security prison in Tashkent. Ilkhom was accused of using a cell phone, in contravention of prison regulations. According to Zaynabiddinov, most prisoners at the Chirchiq facility use cell phones and are normally not punished by prison authorities. Zaynabiddinov believed the transfer was temporary and that his son would be returned to Chirchiq soon. He also reported that he was in good health.

16. (C) Similarly, Zaynabiddinov reported that Ilkhom was beaten in prison by inmates in March 2007 shortly before Zaynabiddinov (who himself was imprisoned at the time) was scheduled to meet with a European Union delegation. Zaynabiddinov believed the incident was arranged by prison authorities and was intended to send him a clear signal not to criticize Uzbek authorities in front of the EU delegation, which he refrained from doing. "Things do not happen in Uzbek prisons at random, there is always a reason," he remarked.

17. (C) In contrast, Zaynabiddinov reported that he was treated well by Uzbek authorities during his own imprisonment and suffered no physical or mental abuse. He was originally sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in January 2006 for extremist activity in connection with the May 2005 Andijon events. Zaynabiddinov was one of the few activists in Andijon to provide up-to-the minute reporting on the events as they unfolded. In the days after the Andijon events,

Zaynabiddinov gave dozens of interviews to the international press and others, accusing Uzbek forces of shooting unarmed protesters. He was amnestied and released from prison on February 2, 2008 (ref A).

SHARES BELIEF THAT IMAM PARPIEV DIED IN PRISON

18. (C) Zaynabiddinov shared his belief that Andijon-based Imam Nematjon Parpiev, who disappeared in September 1997, had died in an Uzbek prison. Zaynabiddinov explained that while he was imprisoned in 2006, he inquired about Parpiev and was reportedly told by a prison guard that the Imam was imprisoned and was severely ill and would likely die soon. Parpiev was the former assistant of Imam Mirzoev, who disappeared with another assistant, Ramazanbek Matkariomov, while attempting to travel from Tashkent to Moscow for an international conference in 2005. After Mirzoev's disappearance, his mosque in Andijon was labeled "Wahhabi" and closed by authorities.

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19. (C) In a series of discussions this past fall with poloff, Zaynabiddinov frequently described the current atmosphere in Andijon as one of "an occupied city," noting that many of its high-level officials come from outside Andijon province. It is not unusual for President Karimov to appoint hokims (provincial governors) who come from different provinces (presumably to weaken the influence of regional clan affiliations). However, in contrast with other provinces, Zaynabiddinov observed that almost no high-level officials in Andijon actually come from Andijon province, a situation he said was highly resented by local residents. Nevertheless, he downplayed the possibility of another violent uprising in Andijon, observing that while residents were unhappy, Andijon was "not a ticking time bomb." He also explained that many residents were still cowed by the memories of the 2005 events and the subsequent government crackdown and were afraid to participate in activities that could be deemed "anti-constitutional." He observed that authorities have kept such a tight lid on Andijon province that there actually has been a decline in perceptible corruption. However, he also noted that residents were angered this fall after Uzbek border guards shot several residents who smuggled goods from neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

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110. (C) Zaynabiddinov reported speaking with several individuals who had fled abroad following the Andijon events, including to the United States, and who had subsequently returned to the city. He estimated that there were roughly 50 such returnees in Andijon. He noted that most of the former refugees regretted returning to Andijon, not because they faced political persecution, but because they gave up economic opportunities they had abroad. Many of the former refugees reportedly have been unable to find employment in Andijon because employers are wary to be associated with them. However, Zaynabiddinov also noted that authorities in some instances have provided jobs to returnees. The returnees also remain under the watchful eye of Andijon authorities and must report on their activities to the police twice a month and have been warned not to congregate together in large groups. He noted that authorities had opened criminal investigations against two of the returnees, but later dropped the charges. Otherwise,

Zaynabiddinov said he was unable to find any evidence that returnees had been imprisoned, mistreated, or persecuted by local authorities.

¶11. (C) When asked why the individuals decided to return to Uzbekistan, Zaynabiddinov explained that it was mostly due to cultural factors, observing that it was difficult for Uzbeks, who typically come from very tight-knit families, to remain abroad away from their relatives for long periods of time. Zaynabiddinov was also told by some of the refugees that Uzbek authorities had reached out to them through their Embassies abroad and offered them safe passage back to Uzbekistan. The Uzbek authorities reportedly promised the refugees that they would not be prosecuted unless evidence emerged that they had borne weapons during the Andijon events and that they would be provided with economic assistance. Zaynabiddinov also reported that authorities in Andijon have provided periodic economic assistance to families who had lost relatives during the Andijon events.

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¶14. (C) On November 20, the Ambassador met with Zaynabiddinov and his colleague Anvar Numanov, a member of the of the Ezgulik human rights group in Andijon. As the two explained, Zaynabiddinov hid in Numanov's home for some time after the Andijon events in 2005. Zaynabiddinov thanked the Ambassador for his human rights advocacy, which he credited with the decision by Uzbek authorities to release him from prison in early 2008. He also thanked the Embassy for the assistance he had received since his release from prison, noting that he had been recently given a Democracy Commission grant to monitor human rights in Andijon, including investigating the welfare of Andijon refugees. He explained that he was still attempting to register a local branch of the Ezgulik human rights

group in Andijon province, noting that Andijon authorities have yet to make a final decision on an application for registration that he had submitted in October (Note: While Ezgulik is registered at the national level, its local branch in Andijon remains unregistered. End note).

COMMENT

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¶16. (C) Zaynabiddinov's information suggests that Andijon refugees who have returned to Uzbekistan face less severe persecution than alleged by international human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, which released a report on Andijon refugees in the spring of 2008. Human Rights Watch conducted its research for the report entirely by speaking with Andijon refugees in southern Kyrgyzstan and did not speak with individuals currently in Andijon. While Human Rights Watch, whose Tashkent office director was denied accreditation this year, can hardly be faulted for having limited access to individuals in Uzbekistan, information provided by refugees needs to be viewed critically. As Zaynabiddinov himself noted, it is not out of the realm of possibility that some of these individuals are economic refugees who are exaggerating reports of persecution in a bid to receive political asylum in third countries. We will continue to follow the situation in Andijon as closely as possible. We remain concerned not only about the treatment of Andijon refugees who return to Uzbekistan, but also about the government's continued attempts to convince third countries, including Kyrgyzstan and Russia, to extradite Uzbek citizens, including some who have applied or have attempted to apply for political asylum (ref B and C). Individuals who have been forcibly returned to Uzbekistan, rather than those who voluntarily returned to Andijon, are more likely to endure mistreatment and denial of due process upon their return. Andijon-related matters remain high on the list of bilateral issues that need to be discussed between senior U.S. and Uzbek civilian officials early in the new U.S. Presidential Administration.

NORLAND

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